**Authenticity in language teaching materials**

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**Abstract**

This chapter aims to explore the notion of authenticity in relation to materials and show how the term has been discussed from the beginnings of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) until the present day. The discussion will centre on the idea that for some researchers ‘authentic’ can be defined by the nature of the material itself while for others authenticity is connected to how a learner ‘experiences’ material i.e. the manner in which they interact with it. If, for example, a learner reads a news story in class in the same way as they might in their own time by choosing it themselves and perhaps by then asking a friend if they have read it, that could be considered an authentic use of material.

After a review of the definitions and debates described above, the chapter moves on to a focus on authentic materials from spoken texts, exploring studies which have sought to investigate materials in three main ways. Firstly, it explores the extent to which materials designed for language learning reflect authentic spoken language. Secondly, the chapter examines the extent to which scripted authentic material (such as soap operas) gives learners a realistic model of authentic unscripted conversations which can be found in corpora . Finally, it examines studies which have researched the effects of spoken and written authentic materials. Implications from these studies will be explained in relation to materials development. The last section of the chapter explores possible future directions for authentic materials development. In particular, it focuses on the challenges and possibilities for teachers and course designers in creating materials based upon spoken corpora and corpora of online language such as that found in blogs, messages and social media posts. . Here the discussion will explore the ways in which materials designers need to be sensitive to authentic language found in corpora and use this to inform materials It will also show the importance of student interaction with such material.

**Introduction**

The notion of authenticity in language teaching materials has been with us for some considerable time and can be dated back as far as 1899 (Gilmore 2007). However, authentic materials have been particularly relevant since the beginnings of CLT. Hymes’ (1972) notion of communicative competence was and is an important theoretical base for CLT. This notion suggests that knowledge of forms cannot be separated from an ability to use them and that in order to communicate a learner will need to call upon one or all of linguistic, pragmatic, strategic and discourse competences (Jones, Byrne and Halenko 2017). Early descriptions of CLT suggested a number of methodological innovations which could be used to aid the development of communicative competence. This included activities which are now familiar to many such as information gaps. Such innovations (e.g. Allwright 1979) were designed to maximise and replicate authentic communication within classrooms as much as possible and by doing so, it was felt they would help to develop communicative competence. As an example, in a typical activity such as describing a picture to a partner who must listen and draw it, a learner may need each competence: the lexis to describe it (linguistic competence), the ability to overcome gaps in their language (strategic competence), the ability to link ideas together (discourse competence) and the ability to provide information in an appropriate register (pragmatic competence). At the same time as such activities were developed, it was also suggested that authentic materials could help to replicate the ‘real world’ in the language classroom and be more motivating for learners (e.g. Brumfit and Johnson 1979). These suggestions have been developed and supported in the research literature up to the present day (e.g. Wong, Kwok and Choi 1995; Peacock 1997; Guariento and Morley 2001; Losada, Insuasty and Osorio 2017) and recently it has also been suggested that the use of authentic materials is aligned with many findings from second language acquisition research (Tomlinson and Masuhara 2017). For example, it is generally accepted that one important aspect of acquisition is that learners need exposure to a large amount of comprehensible input (Krashen 2009) and authentic materials certainly have the potential to provide such input.

Debates about definitions of authentic materials have also been very apparent since the start of CLT and are still ongoing. There is not enough space here to discuss each area of debate so I will explore two key aspects, which Tomlinson (2017: 1-3) terms ‘text authenticity’ and ‘task authenticity’.

Early definitions of authentic texts (taken here to mean spoken or written texts) suggested they could be defined as those produced by native speakers, for a particular communicative purpose within a discourse community (Little, Devitt and Singleton 1989). Texts as diverse as bus timetables, songs and poems might all fit such a definition. However, it is not difficult to take issue with one aspect of this description because many texts with a communicative purpose are not actually produced by native speakers. Recent research (e.g. Jenkins, Baker and Dewey 2018), has shown the frequency by which English is used as a lingua franca in many contexts, meaning that authentic texts are, in reality, produced by English L1 and L2 speakers. This suggests that a more effective definition may be one which predates this : ‘an authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message’ (Morrow 1977: 13). This is helpful as it removes the native speaker aspect and yet allows us to suggest that an authentic text (and for the purposes of this chapter I am not including non-text materials such as photographs ) must have a real communicative purpose of some kind in the discourse community in which it is produced. Even this definition is, however, not without some problems. One issue is, of course, what we mean by ‘real’. A writer of textbooks may write their own texts but might also argue that they have a real purpose (to teach English) and a real audience (learners). They may also argue that as their materials are adapted from real texts, they are also authentic. For this reason, for the purposes of this chapter, an authentic text is defined as one which is produced by a real speaker/writer (although the emphasis here will be on spoken texts), with a real message and intended receiver and not specifically designed for language learning purposes. This definition is not given with the intention of dismissing textbooks but rather to try to give clarity to the discussion.

For some researchers, definitions of authentic texts are less important than how learners interact with them. Widdowson (1998), for example, suggests that the notion of authentic materials is unworkable because learners experience such materials in a totally different way than they would in a discourse community outside the classroom. Texts will often be chosen for them, activities unavailable in the real world will be included which will help them to understand texts and the real context is removed. As a result, Widdowson (1998: 711) argues that ‘the language cannot be authentic because the classroom cannot provide the contextual conditions for it to be authenticated by the learners’. Related arguments have also been made by Breen (1985) in relation to the authenticity of tasks which students undertake when interacting with a text. Breen argues that either these should be communicative or meta-communicative (related to the process of learning) in nature. Tomlinson (2017: 1-3) suggests that an authentic task can either involve learners completing the actual task (e.g. buying a coffee from a coffee shop), completing a replication of the task (e.g. buying a coffee with real menus/props and an information gap as a class role play) or a pedagogic task which allows the development of real world skills or strategies (e.g. groups discuss and rank the best coffee shops based on design, price etc.). Such arguments are very worthy of consideration and ones I will include in this chapter. There are, however, some issues with this discussion. One problem is that suggesting a task is authentic leads to negatively labelling other tasks ‘inauthentic’ and this can then lead to a dismissal of classroom activities which have a useful pedagogic purpose. For example, it is unlikely that answering comprehension questions when listening to a text is authentic, given that it is unlikely to happen in the real world. However, such tasks can help teachers and learners to check the extent to which a text has been understood or misunderstood and that, in itself, is useful. It is also important to recognise, as Breen (1985) does, that the classroom is a discourse community in itself and therefore has its own authentic types of interaction. For example, it is hard to imagine other contexts where we might ask ‘Can you write it on the board?’ but such language has a real communicative purpose, to a real audience and for a real reason in a classroom.

In this chapter then, the main definition of authentic material will be related to the texts themselves and the definition of an authentic text will be, as mentioned, a text that is produced for a real purpose, by a real speaker/writer with a real receiver and not made specifically for language learning purposes. This definition will also be accompanied by an awareness that we do always need to consider the way learners will interact with a text and the extent to which this reflects the types of real interaction they need to undertake.

**Critical issues and topics**

There are numerous issues possible to discuss in relation to authentic materials (see Gilmore 2007 for a useful summary) but the key areas I will focus on are the reasons for using authentic materials as models of spoken English, the usefulness of these materials as models of spoken English and the effects of authentic material in general.

*Reasons for using authentic materials*

One common argument for the use of authentic materials is that if compared to real data, textbooks do not always offer a realistic model of spoken language in terms of its forms and discourse features Such comparison has been undertaken by looking at dialogues used to illustrate particular language functions. For example, McCarthy and Carter (1994) analysed a section of the Australian soap *Neighbours* to examine the speech act of asking for a favour. They found that the soap dialogue was much more complex than the relatively simple sequences often presented in textbooks. Grant and Starks (2001) took a conversation analysis approach in examining how conversations are closed in EFL textbooks when compared to fifty episodes of the New Zealand soap *Shortland Street.* They found that the closings in the soap opera data were linguistically much more varied than the textbook models. Research in this area has also drawn upon data from spoken corpora to make comparisons. Gilmore (2004) analysed seven textbook service encounter listening dialogues (such as reserving a hotel room) in comparison to a set of authentic dialogues recorded using the same questions used by the information receiver in the textbook dialogues and in the same scenarios. He found that the textbook dialogues excluded many of the features of the authentic dialogues including hesitation and overlapping turns. Cullen and Kuo (2007) examined twenty four general English textbooks at a range of levels published from 2000–2006 and found that many common features of spoken grammar found in spoken corpora (e.g. Carter and McCarthy 2006) were given little attention. They divided aspects of spoken grammar into three categories. Category A included those features which need grammatical encoding such as noun phrase heads ‘This food, it’s nice’ or past progressive to report speech ‘John was saying…’. Category B included fixed lexico-grammatical units such as discourse markers (e.g. ‘well’, ‘I mean’) or vague language (e.g. ‘sort of’). Category C included non-standard forms which are frequently accepted in conversational English such as ‘If I was rich…’ Their findings show that Category B features did receive some attention in textbooks but category A received almost no attention except at advanced levels and little attention was given to Category C. Siegel (2014) examined this area with a different focus. Instead of looking at the language of textbook conversations, this study explored the extent to which the topics in textbooks matched those that students actually want and need to talk about and thus the extent to which they can be considered authentic. Topics from a range of textbooks were collected and then compared to recordings of informal conversations between Japanese and international students on a university campus in Japan. Findings showed some similarities (in both cases travel and places was a common topic) but also some marked differences. Two examples of this are that the students talked noticeably less about themselves while ‘the self’ was a common textbook topic and they talked noticeably more about language, which was a less common textbook topic.

This research shows that there is a need to be alert to several issues. The first is that dialogues need to reflect, as much as possible, standard features of authentic conversational texts. This would include language and discourse features such as ellipsis, hesitation, discourse markers, overlapping turns and vague language (see Carter and McCarthy 2006 for an extensive description of spoken English). In situations where teachers are required to use a textbook, this suggests there is a need to at least compare textbook dialogues with authentic dialogues and such comparison can be a useful exercise in developing language awareness (Carter 2003). Alternatively, if the local context allows teachers to do so, it would seem to be advisable to supplement class textbooks with authentic materials or other textbooks which contain dialogues based upon an analysis of corpus data (e.g. McCarthy, McCarten and Sandiford 2014). Such textbook dialogues do not follow the definition of authentic materials used in this chapter but they can certainly be a useful element when building a pedagogic syllabus to advance conversation skills (McCarthy and McCarten 2018). Additionally, as Siegel (2014) shows, learners may have particular topics they wish to talk about which could vary greatly from conversations found in textbooks and it is important to be sensitive to this.

*Authentic materials and useful language*

Recordings of unscripted conversations (e.g. Carter and McCarthy 1997) are surprisingly rare. This means that, in the main, use of authentic materials which are scripted to replicate conversations (e.g. soap operas) or semi-scripted (e.g. chat shows) are more likely to be available to most teachers. It is then worth asking the extent to which such materials are useful and contain language and discourse features identified in the previous section such as hesitation, discourse markers or overlapping turns. The presence of such features does at least expose learners to the reality of most conversations they will need to understand or take part in.

Research in this area has sought to examine authentic materials such as plays, soap operas or situation comedies in order to investigate the features of unscripted conversation they display. Short (1996) argues that the dialogues in many plays contains a number of features of unscripted conversation such as ellipsis whereas certain other features such as hesitation devices may be absent. Unfilled pauses may be present in plays but are often included to create a particular effect such as adding tension, whereas in conversation they are mainly part of normal hesitation. Carter (1998) makes a similar point, suggesting that dialogues from plays often contain many features of conversations found in spoken corpora. He argues that they could be accessible, motivating texts when we wish to explore features of spoken English.

Quaglio (2009) analysed a corpus of the American sitcom *Friends* in comparison with a corpus of conversational English. His findings show that *Friends* was similar to unscripted conversations in many respects and shared core lexico-grammatical features. The sitcom differed in that it featured fewer instances of vague language and narratives and more instances of informal and emotional language. Loeb (2015) examined data from four chat shows and found that they have distinct and predictable patterns of discourse. For example, there is a tendency to frame questions in a personalised manner (relating them to the host and their guest) and to suggest an air of congeniality in order to show the host and the guest and the product they are promoting in a good light. Jones (2017) explored a corpus of the UK soap opera *EastEnders* and compared the dialogues to those found in spoken corpora. A number of the features were similar, including the use of ellipsis and discourse markers but several features were noticeably absent including hesitation and response tokens such as ‘right’ employed to show the listener is following the conversation. Overall, the study concluded that soap operas could serve as a useful and motivating model of spoken English, as they are a ‘halfway house’ between unnatural textbook dialogues and the unscripted conversations found in spoken corpora.

These studies suggest that authentic materials such as soap operas and situation comedies can serve as useful models of conversations. They do not contain all features of unscripted conversation but they do contain some. In addition, providing they are culturally accessible, the dramatic and comedic themes in such materials may be more likely to engage learners’ interest than some other authentic materials. Cook (1998) makes the valid point that some conversationns (such as a recording of two friends chatting in a changing room) may be interesting from a research point of view but may not be of much interest to learners as it is too far removed from their own lives. Similarly, other authentic texts such as chat shows could engage learners but only if they are interested in the celebrity being interviewed and have some awareness of what it is they are promoting.

Learner engagement with authentic texts is a major consideration if we wish to use them for learning purposes (Timmis 2005, 2018; Tomlinson 2017) and it is important that we do not assume that an authentic text is automatically more interesting than something from a textbook. We thus need to bear in mind the interests, age and level of the learners and the context in which learning is taking place when choosing authentic texts. For example, the UK soap opera might well be appropriate for adult learners studying in or coming to the UK but is much less likely to be of use to learners using English in other contexts. Texts should, then, engage students and be a useful model of language.

*Effects of authentic materials*

There have been surprisingly few studies which have sought to examine the effects of authentic materials. Those that have been undertaken have explored this from several different angles. While this makes the studies varied and interesting, it also means that it is not possible to examine the combined effects of a number of similar studies. As a result, I will review samples of the studies in this area focusing on those which have explored authentic materials in relation to learner motivation, perceived usefulness, the development of language awareness and of communicative competence.

Peacock (1997) used class observations to suggest that authentic materials increased motivation significantly compared to textbooks in a study of Korean EFL learners at beginner level. However, when surveyed and asked to self-report levels of motivation and interest, the learners sampled did not find authentic materials to be more interesting than textbooks.

Timmis (2005) developed materials based on engaging authentic videos and employed a framework of cultural access tasks, global understanding tasks, noticing tasks and language discussion tasks. The overall aim was to use engaging materials to raise learners’ awareness of common features of spoken language and so the noticing and discussion task were focused upon features of spoken language such as ellipsis, which were used in each video. Timmis piloted these materials with six teachers based in the UK and Austria and approximately sixty learners and then surveyed them for their responses. Responses from learners and teachers were generally very positive with comments clearly indicating that materials had helped learners to notice features of spoken language which they may previously have missed. Timmis (2018) also developed a unit of materials taking a text-based approach to grammar practice. Authentic texts were chosen because they were thought to be engaging and interesting and language practice tasks were then designed working with the grammar and lexico-grammar in each text. The materials were evaluated either pre- or post-use by sixteen native and non-native English teachers in a variety of countries and contexts. Survey responses indicated that teachers in general considered that such materials and the approach used were a viable option which they could include in their teaching programmes. Both these studies indicate that teachers and learners can see benefits in using authentic materials.

Lin (2010) took a stylistic approach when teaching Shakespeare to twenty-two Taiwanese undergraduate EFL learners enrolled in a ten-week literature class. This involved discussing aspects of language in the texts and how these are used to make meaning. Lin notes that the standard way to test students in this context had been to check their knowledge of content and, as a result, a specially designed test was developed to tap into the various aspects of language awareness. This was administered before teaching began and three weeks after it ended. Tests results show that students made significant gains in their language awareness when pre-an post-test results were compared.

Gilmore (2011) compared the effect of authentic materials compared to textbooks with sixty two intermediate level Japanese EFL learners aged between 19 and 22 studying at a Japanese university. Participants were divided into two groups: experimental (using only authentic materials) and control (using only textbooks) and taught for three hours a week over ten months. All participants were given a battery of eight pre- and post-tests to tap in to the various aspects of communicative competence. These included a grammar test, an oral interview and a listening test. Post-test results showed that the experimental groups’ scores were higher than the control group on all tests and that these differences were significant on more than half of the measures including the listening component and the fluency component of the oral interview. These results, as Gilmore suggests, show that the use of authentic materials meant that learners were exposed to richer input and they then noticed more features of that input, which in turn helped to improve more aspects of communicative competence.

The results of studies such as these indicate the potential positive effects of authentic materials. It is not possible to state this more strongly because there have not been enough similar studies enabling us to compare the results. Clearly, what is needed are more studies following Gilmore’s longitudinal design in different contexts and, where possible, with students of similar levels and with similar or larger sample sizes. More qualitative teacher and student evaluation of authentic materials and tasks in various contexts would also add to the work reported by Timmis (2005, 2018). Such data would allow us to analyse the results from different viewpoints and come to firmer conclusions. Overall, the research discussed in this section has several implications for materials development and these will be discussed in the next section.

**Implications and challenges for materials development**

The two main implications and also challenges arising from the research discussed in the previous section are related to the usefulness of authentic materials and how we can create tasks and activities which in some way mirror the types of authentic interaction learners may have with these materials.

One measure of usefulness discussed is the extent to which the language in an authentic text is a useful model of spoken English, if we compare it to data from a spoken corpus. A simple way we can do this is via comparison with dialogues we can find in open-access corpora such as the Spoken British National Corpus 2014 (hereafter Spoken BNC2014), containing 11,422, 607 words of conversations from a variety of speakers across the UK. Here we might simply access the corpus and compare a conversation with the dialogue from our authentic text, providing they are of a similar genre. In the example from excerpt one, the speakers are close family and friends and are discussing what they think about spas and saunas in relation to free time activities.

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| --- | --- |
| Excerpt 1.Sample transcript from SpokenBNC2014 (2018)  File: S23A |  |
| [S0032](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0032&uT=y): that 's just not how I like spending my    [S0094](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0094&uT=y): no    [S0032](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0032&uT=y): whatever time it is so    [S0094](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0094&uT=y): >> that's a bit weird I 've never been into one like at a gym or something that 'd be weird    [S0032](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0032&uT=y): no that 's the only one only time I have like access to them    [S0094](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0094&uT=y): yeah    [S0021](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0021&uT=y): you should see some of those spas    [S0094](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0094&uT=y): >> no there 's a great one at dance camp like    [S0021](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0021&uT=y): mm    [S0094](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0094&uT=y): just like mainly nice and then you just run out into the cold showers run back in cold showers mm ah    [S0032](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0032&uT=y): >> I do quite like that actually (.) jumping in between the pool and it    [S0021](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0021&uT=y): >> it is    [S0094](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/idmeta.php?idlink=u_who&id=S0094&uT=y): >> mm | |

While it is difficult to suggest that this dialogue itself might make for engaging material, we could compare it to a dialogue from an authentic text where speakers are discussing free time activities. This would enable us to check the extent to which the authentic text has some of these features evident in excerpt one such as backchannel to show listenership (‘yeah’, ‘mmm’), unfinished turns (‘that’s just not how I like spending my’), and the use of frequent lexical items (‘like’ is used here as a verb and discourse marker). It is also useful for learners to compare dialogues such as in excerpt one with textbook dialogues on similar topics and to discuss differences. This can also be undertaken by comparing dialogues from successful speakers at higher levels undertaking tasks which lower level learners need to perform. Jones, Byrne and Halenko (2017), for example, analyse data from speaking tests at different levels of proficiency and show how communicative competence differs at each level. One example of this in relation to linguistic competence is that learners at CEFR B1 level tend to use language to focus on the development of their own turn whereas at B2- C1 levels they start to use words such as ‘yeah’ to respond to and develop the turns of conversation partners. Teachers can also use smartphones to easily make recordings of tasks performed by higher level learners which can then serve as models for lower level learners needing to perform similar tasks. One alternative to this is to adapt dialogues from corpora such as the Spoken BNC2014 this so that they become more accessible to learners, something which textbooks have certainly started to do. McCarthy, McCarten and Sandiford ( 2014).base the dialogues and conversation strategies they teach on information from spoken corpora. This means they may illustrate the use of discourse marker such as ‘I mean’ in a dialogue adapted from a corpus. It is taught because the corpus shows it is a very frequent item used by speakers to help manage their own turn, as it allows them to clarify or elaborate their ideas.

We can also analyse texts using simple open access corpus analysis tools. Sites such as Compleat Lexical Tutor (hereafter Lextutor) (Cobb 2018 allow us to check any text(s) we have and analyse the most frequent words, for example. This can help us to evaluate how useful the language may be in a text. As an example, if we submit the text in excerpt 1 to the ‘vocab profile ‘ option in Lextutor , it shows us that all but the underlined words are from the first thousand most frequent words in the British National Corpus so the dialogue does at least contain very high frequency items. This kind of analysis is helpful when teachers try to assess the suitability of authentic texts for particular levels. Generally speaking, texts which contain a higher proportion of the first thousand words should be easier to understand, although of course other factors such as cultural references and topic are also important when considering this.

As discussed previously, Breen (1985) and others (e.g. Timmis 2018) argue that as well as containing useful language it is of primary importance that authentic materials must engage and interest learners. If they find them engaging, this can encourage re-reading and listening outside of class time. This means that the materials may then become useful sources of comprehensible input (Krashen 2009), something which, as mentioned earlier, is an important aspect of acquiring a language successfully. One way we can assist with this is by choosing materials and tasks which reflect the kinds of interaction students undertake outside the classroom. Mishan (2017) argues that in the current era of Web 2.0, whereby many learners interact with smartphones and on social media, task authenticity is vital. While I would wish to argue that the language used in authentic texts is also key, it seems perverse not to reflect the ways learners interact as mobile-assisted language users (Jarvis and Achilleos 2013). This might mean helping learners to respond to a text by, for example, creating a social media post, as well as simply discussing it in class, or as Mishan (2017:20) suggests, by adapting common activities so that they become more authentic tasks. One suggestion she gives is that as part of getting to know other classmates via introductions, students can create a simple meme about themselves, which can be shared with the whole class via smartphones.

It is also important that we take into account the findings from corpora of ‘e-language’ (e.g. Knight, Adolphs and Carter 2014) used in various forms of online communication, and more general corpora of internet language (e.g. Davies, 2018). Such data allows us to highlight the language used in authentic texts. For example, e-corpora show the prevalence of ellipsis in forms of communication such as text messaging. They also show high frequency chunks which represent the relative immediacy of such communication such as ‘at the moment’ and ‘last night’, often used in social media posts ( Knight, Adolphs and Carter 2014). Should we be using such texts as a form of authentic material, we can highlight these features and, if appropriate (bearing in mind that not every text will contain ellipsis, for example) create activities which encourage learners to use them.

**Recommendations for practice**

Based on the discussion so far, there are three key recommendations which can be made for practice. It is important to re-iterate that authentic texts will not automatically interest learners any more than a textbook and instead it is recommended that teachers evaluate their choice of texts based on points each point made below

1. Draw upon you knowledge of the class when choosing engaging authentic texts.

Breen (1985) notes the importance of knowing a class and their interests as it can help us to find what has been termed an ‘access’ point in a text (Jones and Carter 2011), allowing us to relate it to students’ knowledge and interests. Knowing a class will, in turn, give indications of the sort of texts they want and need to listen to or read. If learners are interested in a text, there is far more chance they will re-listen or re-read it outside of class or want to read similar texts, and they can then become useful sources of input.

2. Ensure that authentic texts contain useful language

Much as it is important for learners to engage with a text, it is also important that it is worth engaging with. There is little point in finding an interesting text which contains very little in the way of useful language. As has been noted, comparisons to corpora are helpful in this regard as they can allow us to see the frequency of language within a text and the extent to which it reflects the discourse organisation of texts we can find in corpora. A teacher’s own judgement is also helpful in deciding if the language in a text is useful and will again depend on knowing a class and what they want and need to learn.

3. Design activities and tasks which reflect authentic interaction

As noted, there is undoubtedly a role for the types of interaction with texts which are mainly found in classrooms, as they have a clear pedagogic purpose. This might include answering comprehension questions, for example. However, it is also important, as Mishan (2017) notes, that tasks reflect the way learners need to interact outside of class time. As an example, chatting to a friend about something you have read may need to be practised online as well as face to face (Jones 2018).

**Future directions**

The discussion so far gives possible future directions for teachers and course designers in developing and testing the effects of authentic materials. Firstly, it seems clear that as larger and more varied corpora develop, whether these are based on spoken corpora (e.g. Jones, Byrne and Halenko 2017), corpora of ‘e-language’ (e.g. Knight, Adolphs and Carter 2014) or corpora of web language (e.g. Davies 2018), these should influence how we view authentic materials. Even if corpora are only used as a point of comparison with engaging authentic texts chosen for classroom use, this is a helpful comparison. This has implications for the skills teachers need now and in future. It seems clear that the ability to analyse authentic texts by using corpus analysis tools and to develop an awareness of how language differs in authentic texts and corpora are a vital part of a teacher’s own language awareness. Increasingly, corpora and corpus analysis tools such as the ones mentioned in this chapter are becoming available in open access formats to facilitate such developments.

Secondly, it is clear that we need to be sensitive to the language within authentic materials *and* student interaction with material. This suggests that there is an increasing need to include activities and tasks with materials which reflect the kinds of interaction learners will have with texts outside of class. We should not discard useful pedagogic activities but we should ensure that we also try to replicate real interaction as much as possible. Teachers will increasingly need to critically evaluate materials and at least be aware of why they are asking learners to complete tasks which are not authentic.

Thirdly, the need to choose engaging, authentic texts for learners (e.g. Tomlinson 2017) has implications for teacher training. If we accept it is important to find such texts, this underlines the need for teachers to know as much as they can about their learners’ interests and needs in order to be able to identify potentially engaging texts and, as Breen (1985) suggests, to actively involve learners in choosing texts to be used. There is a clear argument that some emphasis on these skills should be given in initial pre-service training, alongside how to help learners to understand and potentially use the language in such texts.

Lastly, it is clear that in future more research is needed to measure the long- term effects of authentic materials and how they contribute to the development of communicative competence. Studies, such as Gilmore (2011), need to be replicated in other contexts. In addition, it would be useful to measure the effects of textbooks informed by corpora against those not informed by corpora. We might, for example, compare how teaching the type of corpus-informed conversation strategies and illustrative dialogues found in McCarthy, McCarten and Sandiford (2014 impacts on the development of communicative competence in comparison to teaching with authentic materials as defined in this chapter This could be measured this using the range of communicative tests detailed in Gilmore (2011).

It would also be useful to futher evaluate the kind of text-based approach advocated by Timmis (2018). This approach suggests that teachers could use engaging authentic texts as the basis for lessons. The argument Timmis makes is that this allows teachers the option of engaging with a broad range of lexis and grammar within such texts, once they have been understood and responded.to, as the primary basis for their choice is that they are engaging Such an approach is in contrast to first deciding on a language point and then choosing a text because it seems to have examples of this within it. Timmis (2018) asked teachers in a range of contexts to evaluate sample materials employing this approach and the responses indicate that teachers found it plausible and potentially useful. Such studies could be repeated with larger samples of teachers and learners in more contexts , who could compare this approach to working with textbooks.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have used Morrow’s definition of authentic texts as ‘… a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message’ (Morrow 1977: 13). I have tried to show that when analysing authentic texts, we need to consider how useful they are as a model of language alongside their potential for engaging learners and the authenticity of tasks and activities we use with them. While it is important to note that authentic materials are not superior to textbook material simply because they are authentic, I have tried to show that they can be used to develop communicative competence and language awareness. As such, authentic texts are a useful source of materials with real potential for engaging learners and serving as useful sources of input.

1. **Further Reading**

Gilmore, A. 2011. “I Prefer Not Text”: Developing Japanese Learners’ Communicative

Competence with Authentic Materials, *Language Learning*, 61 (3), 786–819.

This is a quasi-experimental study comparing the effects of authentic materials with

textbooks on Japanese university students studying English as a foreign language. It has a

longitudinal design and uses a battery of tests to measure the effects of the different materials

on different aspects of communicative competence. The study design provides an excellent

model for those wishing to conduct similar studies in other contexts.

Maley, A. and Tomlinson, B. (Eds.). 2017. *Authenticity in materials development for language learning*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars

This book contains a series of studies, classroom reports and opinion pieces focused on the uses of authentic materials and tasks in a variety of contexts. This variety, plus the fact that different designs are used, provides the reader with a usefully broad perspective on the notion of authenticity in materials development. Practical ideas for using authentic materials are also given.

Siegel, A. 2014. What should we talk about? The authenticity of textbook topics. *ELT Journal*, 68 (4), 363–375.

This article is an interesting and useful exploration which focuses on the topics in textbooks in comparison with the topics students actually talk about. Using recordings between Japanese and international students on an international campus, a detailed comparison is made and interesting findings are then reported. The study design provides a useful model which could be replicated in other contexts.

1. **Related topics**

Please refer to chapter five for an extensive discussion on the role of course books, chapter seven for a discussion on the selection of materials and chapter eight, for an extensive discussion on the varieties of English in materials.

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